

SPIRITUAL AND CHRISTIAN *Letters*

L E T T E R S

ON

DIVERSE SUBJECTS

RELATING TO THE

S P I R I T U A L L I F E.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

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**SPIRITUAL AND CHRISTIAN
LETTERS**

O N

DIVERSE SUBJECTS.

LETTER I.

*General Rules for a Person desirous of being devoted
to God.*

THE desire, Madam, which you have formed of devoting yourself entirely to God has given me extreme pleasure. It is indeed the one thing needful, and that which can alone bestow happiness. Devote yourself then to God with all your heart, and never retract the donation. Consider yourself as your Lord's peculiar property. Love him above all things. Endeavour to make his will the rule of *all* your actions. Accustom yourself to that internal recollectedness wherein God is always to be found, and by this

means endeavour to preserve a sense of his divine presence. Thus retire often into yourself to listen to the voice of God, or to address him. Be with Mary attentive at the feet of Jesus. God regards the silent language of the heart infinitely more than any external words, or the reasonings of our understanding. Persevere in faith, humility, and confidence, but above all in Love. So shall your Soul prosper for which I am deeply interested.

L E T T E R II.

Rules of Conduct. Of Reading and Prayer.

THOUGH I have never wished you to be subjected to invariable and indispensable rules, like persons of a religious order; yet it is certain, that I have always been desirous you should set apart a regular part of your time to nourish your soul by prayer, and that species of reading which awakens recollection. But I will begin with those external matters you mention. Since your not visiting is already an established thing, I think you should not for frivolous causes depart from this rule. It would have an appearance of returning to the world, which might have a very bad effect, and is particularly inexpedient, as you only mean to depart from your former regulation as a temporary exercise. Adhere then to your rule in such a manner as suits with your state, yet choose to avoid extremes.

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With regard to attending public worship on ordinary days, I think in the general it would be very proper; yet not daily, as of necessity, but in such a manner as not to stay away without a just cause: not on account of amusements, or such affairs as might very well be postponed. We sometimes waste much time on trifles, that should be dispatched more diligently. A good example to your domestics is an indispensable duty, and this is an additional reason for your daily attendance on public worship; yet, as I said before, I do not wish you to consider it as a rule you could not without scruple dispense with, for it is not possible to observe such exactness. You should sometimes prefer going to church in your own parish, especially at the annual feasts, as Easter, Christmas, &c. which will be sufficient, at other times consult your own convenience.

With regard to internal exercises. Let not any thing but real necessity cause you to neglect daily prayer and reading, for these are essentials. It is these alone which can soften your heart and render it flexible: the hardest wax softens at the fire, and the bright beams of the sun discover a thousand atoms that were before imperceptible. By discovering he disturbs and agitates them, so that what was before apparently pure, is now evidently full of motes and impurity. Thus it is only by exposing ourselves before the sun of righteousness, that we see our faults and imperfections, and this light far exceeds any instruction communicated by the creature, and destroys, by degrees, what at first it discovered at large. This no creature can
effect,

effect, however great their light, or their watchfulness over us. They can only point out our defects, but not remove them. This constitutes the necessity of prayer in every state, it is essential to the life of grace. Our Lord did not content himself with that divine state of prayer he necessarily enjoyed as being God and Man, and passed not only thirty years of his life in prayer and seclusion from the world before he employed himself outwardly in preaching, but he also often retired even from this employment, so necessary to the salvation of men, to solitude and prayer. This he did not do as necessary with regard to himself, being God and Man, but he practised it as an example for us, and to be himself our sanctification. He gave this time to the repose of his human nature, in order that the divinity might overflow it the more redundantly, and it is in this sense that he grew in grace before God and Man. *Luke ii. 52.* This increase could not be but in his human nature which gave place to the divine to penetrate it more, and to overwhelm it with grace, and thus infinitely accelerated our salvation. It was in these moments when, (as the gospel speaks) the Deity himself prayed, *Luke vi. 12.* that he obtained for us the grace of being interior, which after redemption and christianity is the most excellent of all blessings. It is certain, that when we expose ourselves before God, we partake of the efficacy of this divine prayer of Jesus Christ, which influences our souls, and therefore is it so necessary to lay ourselves continually open before him.

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I have never approved of those who under pretence of advancement have neglected actual prayer. This I have always regarded as one of the most dangerous snares of the enemy. I do not mean that prayer may not occasionally be dispensed with on account of essential duties to which we are called by God: But what are those essential duties which leave us no moments of repose before God? There are none such. It is through neglect of prayer that we drag on an imperfect life, and that we are neither penetrated nor warmed by the divine light, this light of truth, the light of Jesus Christ. The less we pray, the less we desire to pray, because being always engaged in outward things, we are so habituated to them, that we are scarcely able to retire inward. I beseech you to make trial of what I have said, and you will then be sensible of its truth. It is natural to proceed in a work which occupies and pleases us, and the enemy (who is often no other than our corrupt nature) cares not by what means he seduces us from prayer, so he deprives us of it. Receive this instruction as the prophet did his from the mouth of the ass, and be persuaded that my darkness and defects are greater than those of any of your brethren, but God is always God, and that suffices me.

LETTER

LETTER III.

Spiritual Consolations are not given us to amuse ourselves therewith, but to strengthen us and teach us to fulfil our duty. Sadness contrary to true devotion.

I KNOW not, Madam, who has been able to inspire your mother with such evil dispositions towards you. The last time I had the honour of seeing her, she appeared much dissatisfied, though I did all in my power to remove her prejudices. Since you are so humble to ask my opinion, I must acknowledge, that I believe you ought to make the pleasing her your principal study. That devotion that terminates only in certain sensible delights is not real and solid. Those divine satisfactions are bestowed on us by God, to encourage us in the performance of our duty, and not that we should rest in them as the end of our devotion. Endeavour then so to profit by the mercies God has bestowed on you, that there may be visible in your outward deportment some reflection of that which you inwardly possess. It is not by speaking of God that we should express what we feel from him; on the contrary, that would injure us, and if you will be guided by my opinion, you will be for a long time silent with regard to the things of God, that you may rather speak to than of him.

It is the will of God to operate secretly in us, and if we ought to manifest this operation, it should

should be by a gentle, humble, affectionate, and chearful conduct.

Your mother and all your friends are extremely hurt by the profound melancholy that appears in your countenance. In the name of God, madam, endeavour to fight against it. Your melancholy appearance would rather serve to deter from piety than to render it desirable. We should serve God with that species of chearfulness that evidences we serve him with pleasure, and with that freedom that shews his yoke is neither weighty nor burthensome.

Melancholy produces barrenness of soul, contracts the heart, and renders it unfit to receive the impressions of grace. If you would be acceptable to God, you ought to labour indefatigably to overcome this disposition. Fear not retiring frequently to prayer; on the contrary, yield freely to this attraction, you will find it peculiarly profitable, and I especially recommend it to you to nourish your soul by reading. Accustom yourself to some outward employment; you ought to do so were it only as a remedy against languor and melancholy. Above all things be deeply persuaded that there is no solid virtue, no true mortification, and consequently no secure state of prayer, but while we labour efficaciously to conquer our natural tempers and inclinations, and make a virtue of necessity, by receiving equally all that befalls us; contenting ourselves with that which we have, and suppressing all desires for that which we have not. Courage, my dear young lady, God has not shewed you so much of his mercy to de-

sert you in this sweet path, and you cannot testify your gratitude but by suffering his providence to conduct you by those that are your superiors, and by acquiescing to the contradictions and embarrassments occasioned by the different events of his providence.

You ought not to extend your piety to things at a distance, and by which perhaps you may never be exercised, but let it all be comprised in the acceptance of that which providence presents you with, whether sweet or bitter; in a diligent application to duty, and an extraordinary complaisance towards your mother. Finally in continual mortification which may well be exercised in all the events of life, independent of any other than what is contained in this absolute submission to the will of God.

I believe you would do well to come to an eclaircissement with your mother, in order to know what it is that offends her in your conduct, and to promise for the future more attention to prevent it.

You have I am persuaded no doubt of my being very sincerely yours.

L E T T E R IV.

The necessity of making obedience the rule of our actions.

SINCE you suffer me to write to you, I shall do so simply as the Lord enables me.

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There is an absolute necessity that all our actions should be regulated by obedience, otherwise God will not bless them. I think also that it will tend to the advancement of God's glory that you should freely submit your letters to the inspection of Madam —. This will betimes accustom you to simplicity, it will increase your confidence in her, and be productive of various other good effects. There is no reason you should write without there be an absolute necessity; and it would be ill done to interrupt your communion with God, either to write or speak of him: to this occupation all things should give place except our necessary employments: for, (agreeable to what I have already told you) the order of divine providence respecting us should be preferred to every thing else: not that we need quit the presence of God for any thing; for remember once for all this important truth, that communion with God is not lost, nor even weakened by any of the necessary employments of our state: it can only be destroyed by those of our own choosing, because these being the fruit of mere self-will, are entirely opposite to that pure will of God which is only found in obedience and providence.

In order to comprehend this, you should be fully convinced that there is a distinction to be made between an intimate communion with God, and the sensibility or enjoyment resulting from this communion. This sensibility is as the perfume spoken of in the Canticles, which though it is an evidence of the bridegroom, is neither the reality of that presence nor yet the bridegroom;

the odour of this perfume is easily lost, but his intimate presence is not therefore the less real.

The same is true of love. God gives the delightful sensation of divine love, in order to withdraw the soul from all inferior attachments; but the reality of love is only then given when the soul, independent of all sensations in this spiritual milk, passes on to the unknown of God, following the bridegroom wheresoever he leads, without fear of being sullied or defiled by the necessary employments, which arise from the state wherein his providence has placed her.

Infant love always wishes to enjoy the sweetness of caresses, but adult and vigorous love prefers suffering for the beloved. I know it is the delights which are bestowed upon beginners that inspires their thirst of suffering, for the more Christ discovers his charms to the soul, the more it is inflamed with ardour to be consumed in sufferings for him; but she knows not what she asks, because she is then clad with the divine power which this spiritual sweetness communicates; for when she comes to suffer these things without any apparent support, she sinks with apprehension at the very sight of what she had been enamoured with before.

You must now begin to evidence your love to God, not merely in enjoying the sweetness of his favours, but applying yourself to the duties of your state. You must preserve the intimate presence of God in all that you do, and not be embarrassed though you should lose the sweet sensation of this divine presence, provided you preserve the

the reality thereof. When you have fulfilled what is necessary to others, and the duties of obedience which your state requires, give the remainder of your time to prayer: but accustom yourself early to an ardent and incessant prayer, which your avocations may not interrupt or dissipate. If you believe me in a matter in which I have had some experience; God will be more powerfully felt by you amidst those avocations which are in the order of his providence, (I mean not those which you choose for yourself) than even in the seasons allotted for prayer; whereas if you neglect your duties for the indulgence of retirement, far from finding this blessing, you will be sensible of an inward reproach.

God has given you a great attraction to prayer, and this is a proof that he calls you to a state of continual death and renunciation. Be persuaded, madam, that we do not die to ourselves, but by those means which God sends us for that very purpose, by the wise management of his adorable providence. The greatest mortifications and deepest humiliations that we choose for ourselves, frequently serve to supply food to self, instead of promoting its death; but those which divine providence sends, and which we do not expect, are truly effectual for the destruction of self.

The operations of God infinitely exceed those of our natural abilities, and are ever attended with peace and satisfaction. The heart of man may be easily moved and softened by objects less than God; but it cannot be filled, quieted, nor experience divine contentment but when God pours himself

himself abundantly into it. If those sparks from his love, which you have already seen, cause you to taste such pure delights, what will you experience when the eternal truth manifests himself to you; but be at the same time persuaded, that God showers down his delights upon us, only to enable us to sustain the weight of the cross. It is true, the cross is no cross to him who loves, to him, who through love, thinks nought of toil and labour, but when love withdraws and conceals itself, and leaves him under the weight of sufferings; it is then he becomes sensible of their burthen. Let us not judge of our courage by what we feel when under the sweet influences of love, but form our judgement in this respect when suffering the rigours it inflicts. Let us then accustom ourselves to an ardent and generous love, which neither sweetness nor bitterness retards. This state leaves the soul apparently inactive, because the influence of God absorbs (if I may so speak) the action of the soul. Yet, nevertheless, she acts very essentially in suffering herself to be moved by the holy spirit.

Remain then in a profound silence, and as the scripture says, "Be silent O all flesh before the Lord." *Zech. ii. 13.* Once more let me repeat, neglect not your duties in order to be at liberty for prayer, but employ all your remaining moments in that exercise, and especially preserve in all your occupations the spirit of prayer.

It is a real martyrdom in grace, when we are so devoted to the will of God, and even to that of others, that it is not our own will that governs us, be the occasion what it may.

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There are many things to be said on this subject, but my fever will not suffer me to proceed.

God inspires the soul with desires for contempt and sufferings when he would lead her in that path, and not to urge her so to act as purposely to render herself contemptible. We must receive with pleasure all that crucifies and humbles us.

This corresponds with the light you have received, *To die to holy things.*

Attach yourself firmly to your duty, since even by this you will die to your inclination for solitude, which was not given you to render you a recluse, but to prevent your being dissipated by outward things, and acting in them under the government of caprice and worldly motives.

With regard to the lady you mention to me; our Lord having directed her to you, will give you necessary instructions. I shall not neglect, when I am well, sending you something for this end, if God enables me. It is in him that I am entirely yours.

LETTER V.

Several salutary Advices for Beginners.

AS you have desired me, my very dear cousin, to write to you on those subjects we lately conversed about, although I then thought I had answered you fully, yet I will with all my heart satisfy you further as far as it is in my power,

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at least I will speak to you on those articles which principally occur to me. The first I recollect relates to the small portion of time at your own disposal, which the community you are with affords you for particular intercourse with God. To this I answer, that as communities are calculated for the advantage of the generality, and not for individuals, it is necessary, that in their establishment, more regard be paid to what may tend to the general good, than to what, perhaps, might better suit some individuals; consequently, it is expedient, that there should be a considerable degree of occupation in religious houses as a remedy against weariness and negligence; it dissipates temptation, and has many advantages which I need not here specify, because the matter in question does not relate to a community in general, but only to yourself. To you, therefore, I say, you will have sufficient time, if you are careful to employ it well.

With regard to the proper employment of time, which constitutes the happiness of life, it is necessary to retrench all the demands of self, since self oblivion is one essential requisite to the employment of our time well. If you retrench all the pursuits of self, and all self indulgences, you will then devote all your leisure to God, and this is the essential point for you.

Perhaps you imagine more leisure than you enjoy is necessary to perform what God requires, but in so thinking, you grossly deceive yourself. You will have sufficient time for all God requires of you, if you confine yourself within the bounds
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of real duty, without imposing on yourself a yoke God has not imposed, and which, according to the gospel rule that requires self renunciation, would be destructive to you, since it would strengthen your natural activity, and nourish your vivacity, which is of the utmost consequence to you to destroy, if you would in any measure correspond with God's mercies towards you. To succeed in this, retrench to the very utmost the effects of your vivacity which are (not to say hurtful to you) of little value in the sight of God. Suffer his grace to operate, which by your self activity you often stifle, or at least prevent its expansion. So will you find sufficient leisure. I speak with my usual freedom because you desire it, and that the sincerity of my friendship towards you will not admit of a contrary conduct.

Be assured you will never be happy otherways, for the principal point of piety is to be devoted to the duties of our state, whatever they may be, as rightly to fulfil them, and not in the observation of a multitude of prayers and practices that God does not require. God will not demand whether you have read much, or recited many prayers, but whether you have fulfilled his will, and loved him with all your heart. The infallible method of performing his will is on all occasions *to act properly, and to fulfil perfectly all that is included in the state wherein he has placed you.* These duties are not the effect of our own choice; and since our self-will is the source of all our corruption, every thing that prevents the indulgence of it is extremely salutary. Those employments

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that we do not choofe have this effect, and therefore are highly advantageous.

Be perfuaded, my dear coufin, that in order to correspond with thofe inspirations which God has given you, to be his without refcrve, it is neceffary you fhould lay this as a foundation, that all depends on the good ufe of time, and to fulfil our duties with perfection, but as each of thefe propofitions are included in the other, therefore the true way to teach you the right ufe of time, is in fact to instruct you in the beft manner of fulfilling your duties, for to do this is rightly to employ your time. Let us begin with the firft of all duties, which is that of prayer.

Though you fhould have but half an hour in the day to pray, yet if you employ this half hour in intercourfe with God alone, in loving him, in abiding in his prefence, in facrificing all to his fupreme will, and that you are perfuaded this half hour is given you, in order to lay the foundation of all you are to do in the courfe of the day; is it not true, if you pray in this manner, that you will then endeavour to prefcrve the fpirit of prayer in all your actions? This will caufe you to walk in the prefence of God, which (while it enables you, as the fcripture fpeaks, to poffefs your foul in peace) is the moft certain means of moderating that exceffive vivacity, which would deftroy the health both of your foul and body. Your mind and heart tranquilifed by this fenfibility of God, that you have nourifhed and cultivated in the morning prayer, will caufe you to perform all your actions in the beft manner, and to do that through

through the love of God with joy and tranquillity, that you would otherways, being full of yourself, do with agitation and disgust. Finally, be assured, that we are not saved by a multitude of actions, but by doing all that is required of us with love and fidelity.

This small portion of time, which you thus employ in the morning, supposing you are allowed no more, will be as a taste of the most delicious wine or food, which creates a desire for more, whereas, had it been taken to excess, its excellency, however great, would not prevent its cloying. Too long a prayer, even though not destitute of unction, blunts the edge of this desire, instead of which a shorter prayer, which we endeavour to persevere in through all our succeeding employments, preserves in the soul a desire of prayer, and causes all its actions to partake of the spirit of it, thus bearing in them the principle of life.

After prayer succeed the other employments of the day. Endeavour particularly to discharge well the duty of the present moment. The eagerness of your spirit carries you involuntary through all you are to do afterwards, and this causes a precipitancy that will be extremely pernicious, if you do not betimes accustom yourself to stop this impetuosity.

There are two ways of effecting this, which you may and ought to practise. First by instantly stopping, and sinking into a simple momentary recollection, which will tranquilize your spirit and compose it, as a troubled water that we let stand in

order to clear. The other remedy is not to be occupied by the future, to think of what you are to do only at the time you are to do it, and to confine your attention to the duty of the present moment. This practice will render you ever present to the action you are engaged in, and remove from you a certain natural defect, which causes you to be almost perpetually hurried away in your spirit, from your present avocation to some future period, so as to be in a measure absent from yourself. This is at least the case, when you are not so engaged as to have all your natural eagerness excited, for you are either too eager, and too much engrossed, or quite abstracted. My perfect knowledge of your heart, my dear cousin, causes me to speak to you with so much freedom. I know that you desire to live to God without reserve, and that it is through his love alone that you thus consecrate yourself to him. Moreover, I am certain, you will be very happy if you enter into what I have said, and also that you never can be so in any other manner. By dropping all considerations of the future, you break the force of an infinity of temptations which only respect futurity, and leaving that to God by a pure resignation of your whole soul to him, you engage this same God whose love and kindness are infinite, to protect you in a singular manner.

It is also of very great importance to you, to place your devotion principally in an attachment to all the duties of that state wherein God has called you, because those actions wherein there is least of self-will, are those which are most agreeable to God,

God, and in reality cause us most to renounce ourselves. For what renunciation is it to act always from our own inclination? When we act by obedience, following where duty leads, we then always fulfil the will of God, and we then love God, when we always discharge those duties he calls us to, and do so, actuated by the pure desire of pleasing him, and incessantly renouncing ourselves. There can be no solid piety nor happiness without thus preferring duty to inclination in whatever state we may be in. Nothing conduces more to happiness than to execute with cheerfulness all that we are necessarily compelled to go through, nor is there any more solid instance of piety than on all occasions to sacrifice our self-will to every thing that God ordains, or even suffers to come to pass.

But you will reply that this is very harsh to one who is in a free and independant state, and who appears to enjoy that freedom from their birth, and by the will of providence. To this I answer: That there is no state, however independant, in which a person fond of liberty will ever attain it, unless they acquire real freedom by those things which appear as shackles. The one thing necessary is to perform all our duties in the most excellent manner, and let this constitute our happiness, being the only foundation of it.

Let us, my dear cousin, place all our felicity in fulfilling the good pleasure of God. Let his will be ours, and thus shall we experience content and happiness. I say also, that with these dispositions, the same things which are now a restraint will no longer appear such.

I advise

I advise you to read less, but with more composure. Let your reading rather tend to affect your heart, than to burthen your understanding with such things as far from keeping you in a state of holy breathings after divine blessings, would rather tend to stifle the life of grace in your soul, like a person who after a race or intemperate eating can scarcely breathe. Nature is always active and eager; grace, tranquil, composed, and exact in the discharge of duty. Believe me peculiarly yours.

LETTER VI.

Divers rules of conduct.

IN answer to what you mention, relative to the attentions due to others, I acknowledge, that an endeavour to avoid giving pain in any manner to those with whom we live, is undoubtedly proper; but then this may be carried too far. To fulfil our duties, and to be engrossed by them, are things in themselves very different. Look more to God. It is he alone who can enable you to fulfil your duties, without suffering them to occupy you too much, and can cause you to perform them in a perfect manner, destroying by degrees those defects that now your soul is subject to. When you are conscious of being thus occupied either with yourself or with others, turn inwards, look up to God, and you will feel all fall to the ground.

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We are never so occupied by outward things, but because our heart is filled with them, nevertheless God requires a void therein, as a necessary qualification to receive of his fulness.

Our defects in the general proceed either from our neglect of prayer, or our not retaining the presence of God. It is he alone who can empty, in order to fill us with his grace. We must often expose ourselves and our miseries before him; for to expect to attain the desired end by any other means, is to expect to be enabled to fly without wings, for that labour by which in our own strength we endeavour to vanquish our defects is as unprofitable as discouraging.

Proceed then in the method I have pointed out, and be assured, you will prove the advantages of it. It is well that friendship excites you to the practice of virtue, and it is God who causes these unions, yet even this friendship must be sanctified. But let us not flatter ourselves that our virtue is sufficiently strong and persevering, to be always guided by religious principles, if we met with nothing but difficulties, and if these were not softened by the delights of friendship. One proof of this is, the different manner in which we act to those who slight our friendship, and whom we do not love, from what we do with regard to those who love and affect us. Nevertheless, a firm and constant virtue would produce an uniform conduct in both circumstances.

As you know the principle that prompts me to speak to you with freedom, even a very tender friendship in Christ Jesus, I rely on your receiving
lovingly

lovingly all that I shall say; for why should we flatter each other, whose friendship has no other end but to facilitate the rendering us acceptable to our Redeemer? If our love does not assist us in this great point, is it not false and deceitful? Upon this principle I venture to tell you, that you have always acted blameably with regard to your diet, and nature veils itself under the pretence of attention to others. It is good to be attentive, but necessary not to be too much so. To vanquish your temper you must pass by a multitude of trivial things that are grating to your disposition, and in order to do this successfully and efficaciously, you must expect your temper to be thwarted, and look up to God for direction and assistance. Then you will give the same orders without chiding, and they will have more effect.

Nothing is so wounding to an upright mind as deceit, but as God has not appointed us for correctors of human nature, and as charity should cover a multitude of faults, I would rather abstain from mentioning the defects of others, because perhaps if God had bestowed on them the same graces he has on us, they would have profited more by them; and especially, because all we can say on these things rather sullies ourselves than purifies them.

With regard to your dress, I would wish you to be less attentive to it, and to despise such matters.

Do not fix certain days for communicating, but choose those wherein you will be least embarrassed. Attend public worship as frequently as it is in
your

your power. I would have you abstain from communicating on those days wherein you suspect the having done or said aught whereby your domesticks might be offended, for we are accountable to the strong and to the weak.

I wish you to spend at least half an hour every day in prayer, and more, if possible. It is not immediately upon our approaching the fire that we are benefited by its heat, but after being some time before it.

If we employed all the time in prayer that we are at liberty to spare from our necessary avocations, the spirit of prayer would diffuse itself through all these employments, and we should be preserved from many of those faults we commit in the discharge of them.

It is a great misfortune to be obliged to draw after you such a numerous train of domesticks, it being incumbent on us carefully to avoid giving offence to any. All things are lawful for me, says St. Paul, but all things are not expedient.

LETTER VII.

Concerning lesser mortifications for one who desires to be devoted to God.

I Yield to the attraction I feel to write, and to conjure you to devote yourself unreserved to God, particularly by renouncing yourself in those little things which I am by him compelled to mention to you. What abundant blessing do we

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draw

draw down by little sacrifices! You love God, testify that love by the renunciation of some gratifications. I love you sincerely because God loves you, and that I am convinced he has chosen you in order that his grace may triumph over the impetuosity of your natural sentiments. You are sufficiently persuaded, that you can never vanquish yourself but by having frequent recourse to the presence of God, by silence, and a retirement suited to your state. But even this though a great deal is not enough, you must renounce all those pleasures and satisfactions to which you are too much attached. Retrench magnificence. If you do not love the world, why do you wear its livery like those who do? Renounce then its superfluities, nor imagine that by so doing you exercise an heroic virtue, when in fact you only fulfil a simple debt of justice, which you cannot without sin omit: for by this means you will by degrees be enabled to pay your debts.

Your actions agree not with your sentiments. Your sentiments of God are just, and yet in your exterior conduct you resemble those who have no proper ideas or principles on any religious subject. Observe decency, but retrench all vanity and magnificence. Shun dangerous conversations, that you hereafter may be in a state to avoid all those that are needless.

Avow your christianity. The independance of your state enables you to do this with the greater confidence, as you are under no obligation to render an account to any of what you retrench yourself in for the love of God.

Accustom

Accustom yourself to the exercise of patience, nor be discontented when you are not drest according to your inclination. Your anxiety to be early at church causes you to resent the tediousness of your attendants. Would it not be a less evil to be half an hour later? God accepts not those devotions which are the consequence of our impatience. When you find your temper agitated, remain silent, for it is much easier to impose silence on ourselves than to say little when we have begun to speak.

There is a great violence necessary to conquer such a disposition as yours, nevertheless I hope that you will maintain the victory, for God having so called you, will not fail to afford you peculiar strength and assistance. Devote yourself truly to him, that he may enable you to fulfil the advice he has prompted me to give you.

LETTER VIII.

Prayer and mortification recommended as the foundation of piety.

YOU will without doubt be astonished to hear from me, but your kindness has emboldened me. As you have resolved to devote yourself to God, you cannot be too careful to lay a deep foundation, since it is on the firmness of the foundation that the height and stability of the edifice depends. Many begin to build, without being able to finish or to per-

severe therein, because their building is founded on the sand instead of being established on the living stone Christ Jesus. You must endeavour to avoid this error. You have power to do so, and that you may exert it is my earnest desire, being interested for your perfection with all the ardour I am capable of.

You have nothing to fear if you persevere in that manner of prayer you mentioned to me. Make it an inviolable law to yourself never to forsake it, and be careful to manage your time in such a manner that you may always find leisure for it. Never consult your inclination in this respect, but rather the fidelity you owe to God. Then aridity will be as profitable as sweetness, provided your prayer is always accompanied with a solid mortification.

Let us not flatter ourselves; prayer and mortification are two sisters, so essentially linked together, that the forsaking of the one is the death of the other. The want of unction in prayer is often caused by immortification. God is a jealous God. He punishes our infidelities and delicacy by absenting himself from us, and the absence of God causes coldness and aridity, which are succeeded by a disgust of piety. Never pass a day without some exercise of mortification. Make daily this double sacrifice, to deprive yourself of some pleasure, and to do somewhat repugnant to your inclination. Our divine model Jesus Christ, not only renounced all pleasures for our advantage, but embraced a life of sufferings. Thus it is written, that "he preferred the Cross." (Heb. xii. 2.)

xii. 2.) Let us beware of flattering ourselves in these respects.

Be sincere with God, but let all you do be purely through the love of him, and conceal as much as possible all your exercises of this kind from the eyes of the creature, so that you may in all your actions preserve a single eye towards him. God has more respect to the intention than to the action. Those who seek human approbation in what they undertake for God can never succeed therein. This sandy foundation will soon moulder away, and confound them before those whose esteem they have pursued.

Devote yourself then to God with a sincere, upright, and disengaged heart. Continually mortify and renounce yourself. The exercise of mortification by degrees renders it easy and familiar. It is harsh and full of asperity to those who fear and shun it, but mild and easy to its followers. If you persevere steadily in this path, great are my hopes in respect of you. The mercies with which God has prevented you engage you thereto, nor can you draw back without an extreme ingratitude. Believe me, &c.

LETTER IX.

On the defects of spiritual persons.

I Have one particular to advise you in which relates to you and to all, and this is to esteem things as they really are.

You

You have formed to yourself such an extravagant idea of the creatures when you believe them enlightened by God, that you suppose they must needs be impeccable; so that full of this idea, that the children of God should be exempt from errors, you are reduced to this dilemma, either to believe them really without defects, or to attribute these very defects to God. For example, you believe God has inspired an haughty violent harsh temper to destroy the self-love of others, but this is by no means the truth. God does not need our sins to effect his work, but he suffers these defects to humble his children (who should make that use of them) and to make us sensible that God alone is holy. This reflection constitutes my happiness. Call that virtue which is really virtue, and those imperfections which in fact are such.

N —, for instance, is upright, sincere, disinterested, but her impetuosity, haughtiness, and asperity, are real defects. These things make us see what God is, and what we ourselves are: They make us sensible that even the best creatures, though burning and shining lights, can but imperfectly assist us. Let us then by sinking inwardly have recourse to him, who has indeed the word of eternal life. We may point him out and say, "Behold the Lamb of God." But you yourself must go to him.

On the necessity of prayer at stated times.

THE more you accustom yourself to prayer, so much the more easy you will find it to pray. It is on this account I conjure you to be faithful to the grace of prayer, and never suffer your dullness or your chearfulness to enslave you into a neglect of this duty. It is true, we often find ourselves more recollected at other times of the day than at the immediate time of prayer—but that recollection is nevertheless the fruit of our prayers. During the immediate time of our eating we have no sensation of fullness, but when we have done eating, it is then that we find ourselves filled and satisfied—but if we never eat at all we shall in the end find ourselves empty. The recollection which we enjoy in the course of the day, is derived from actual prayer, and if we neglect to make actual prayer we shall insensibly lose our daily state of recollection. There are some people who omit stated times of prayer because they find themselves more recollected when they are not praying than at the time of prayer—but this is a mere delusion, and hath often proved fatal to their interior and true life.

On the subject of prayer, I have written
a little more than you are now writing. I
to mention it, I have only one thing to
say. It is, on this subject, I suppose you to
be satisfied in the grace of prayer, and that
your conduct of your children to con-
vert you into a neglect of this duty. It is
true, we often find ourselves more recollected
at other times of the day than at the time
of prayer. But that is not the reason
why we are not more recollected. During
the time of prayer, we have no
distraction of thought, but when we have done
prayer, it is then that we find ourselves filled
and satisfied—but if we never get at all we
shall in the end be empty. The
recollected state which we enjoy in the course of
the day, is but a result of prayer, and if
we neglect to pray, we shall in-
evitably lose our daily state of recollection.
There are some people who are fastidiously
of prayer, because they find themselves more
recollected when they are not praying, than at
the time of prayer—but this is a mere delu-
sion, and will not prove fatal to their
not and true this.

